

Many give thanks for gift of food (The News Journal)

1,850 turkeys donated and distributed to those in need in Wilmington

By ROBIN BROWN

The News Journal

WILMINGTON -- Grace Lively always bought a Thanksgiving turkey, but not this year.

She recently adopted her 5-year-old granddaughter, Drea, and has been having trouble making ends meet with both of them living on her fixed disability income.

"It's a struggle," she said.

So the 66-year-old, who lives in Dunleith just outside Wilmington, made a humbling decision. For the first time, she asked to be included in a turkey giveaway.

"It's very hard to ask for help," Lively said, swallowing hard and staring at her feet. "Very hard."

Granddaughter in tow, Lively made her way Tuesday to NOR Enterprises/Our Youth Inc. on B Street, headquarters of a turkey donation drive led for 25 years by Norman Oliver, the youth group's director and former city councilman.

"I started with about two dozen turkeys," Oliver said. Last year's drive gave out about 1,200 turkeys and fixings, most to low-income, elderly residents of the city's high-rise apartments.

Co-sponsor Rep. Hazel D. Plant, D-Wilmington East, said the nation's hard times make the distribution that much more critical. She called the project "beautiful."

Despite

the economy squeezing wallets and donations to charities fading nationwide, Oliver decided to raise this year's goal to 1,600 turkeys.

Requests

tripled at the nonprofit Peoples Settlement Association, said program director Brenda Gunter. "It's really hard this year," she said. "It's a really big need and it's harder to get donations."

There

were no signs of the grim times when Lively -- and many others seeking turkeys -- arrived at the giveaway headquarters, which looked more like a block party.

Police

Chief Michael Szczerba said the event shows "a Wilmington people don't see," going beyond helping the needy by highlighting "the volunteerism that goes on daily" and setting a positive example for the city's young people.

He and a

crew of officers arrived early to steer traffic around scores of donors, volunteers, service group trucks and volunteers' vans -- and a steady stream of people dropping off turkeys.

State

Treasurer and Gov.-elect Jack Markell, a longtime supporter of the effort -- who said Monday he canceled his inaugural ball for a weekend of service -- said all who are able should help families "struggling to keep food on the table."

Scanning the crowd, he said, "This is what it's all about."

As Rep. Mike Castle, R-Del., arrived with two Butterball turkeys, he quipped, "No turkey jokes, please."

Sen.

Tom Carper, D-Del., who gave what he called "the biggest turkey I ever picked up in my life," praised the project as "a real blessing. ...

There are so many people hurting and in need, what an effort like this does is bring people together to help."

Those

people ranged from attorney Larry Tarabicos, organizer of a donation drive at Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor, to members of the Southbridge-based Wheels of Soul, Delaware Chapter. George Taylor of New Castle, owner of T-N-T Cycles near New Castle, said the motorcycle club has given turkeys for nearly a decade, including 200 this year.

"It's

not a black thing, it's not a white thing, it's not a race thing, it's just people helping people in a time of need," he said, adding two more birds to a pile. Seniors crowd around the deliveries, he said, adding, "We see their eyes light up every year... some of them cry."

Members of Sisters on a Mission brought three turkeys. "We do what we can," said Chevala Oliver-Berry.

New

donor Nancy Stabler, president of Ogletown-based Stabler & Associates, said, "I found out about it Friday and stopped all my work." She said she and her husband, Nicholas S. Stabler III, firm vice president, came up with "300 turkeys and enough canned food and stuffing for 126 families."

Moments

after a brief ceremony, eight new Wilmington Fire Department recruits worked like a precision bucket brigade, relaying the frozen turkeys to volunteers' trucks and vans.

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Brown, 49, of Wilmington, who is unemployed and struggling to keep going after the death of one of her children, said she didn't know what to do if she didn't get a turkey there.

There

were 1,850 turkeys donated and distributed, Oliver said, and that provided for all the elderly, low-income and disabled residents who registered in advance -- and that list including Brown and Lively.

Lively said she is grateful and her family will enjoy Thanksgiving because of the free turkey.

With a little laugh, she said, "It's a big one."

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